

Grievances

“ **The only Representatives of the People of these Colonies, are Persons chosen therein by themselves, and . . . no Taxes ever have been, or can be Constitutionally imposed on them, but by their respective Legislature.**

The Stamp Act Congress, 1765

When Parliament directly taxed the colonists, it bypassed the legislative assemblies elected by voters in each colony. Americans objected that Parliament lacked legislative authority over them. They insisted that those who enacted colonial laws and taxes needed to be chosen by colonial voters and to share basic interests with their constituents and neighbors. Government was legitimate only when it actually represented the people being governed.



Detail from "Burning the Stamps in Boston, August 1765," by Daniel Chodowiecki, Berlin, 1784
Courtesy of Granger Historical Picture Archives

The Stamp Act

This leather document box, marked with the words “Stamp Act Rep’d/ March 18, 1766,” celebrated the repeal of the unpopular Stamp Act, a Parliamentary tax on colonial newspapers, pamphlets, legal documents, and playing cards. Most Americans and many Britons in England welcomed the repeal as a way to heal divisions within the empire. Several similar boxes have survived, each with different initials but marked with the same phrase and date.



Stamp Act box, 1766

[View object record </collections/nmah_530070>](/collections/nmah_530070)

Townshend Revenue Act

Relief at repeal of the Stamp Act evaporated when Parliament passed new duties on goods imported into the colonies. The new legislation also made law enforcement more independent of colonists' own ideas of what was just and fair. It appointed officials to enforce the law, provided them with broad authority to search private stores, and established courts without colonial juries to try disputed cases. Parliament rejected colonial claims that law enforcement, like lawmaking, needed to be accountable to colonial opinion.

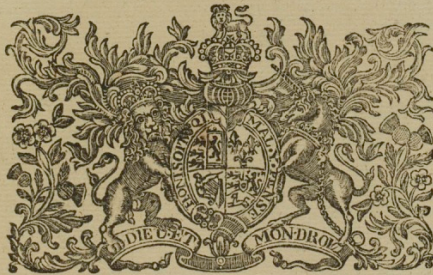
Anno Regni
GEORGII III.
R E G I S

Magnæ Britanniae, Franciæ, & Hiberniæ,

S E P T I M O.

At the Parliament begun and holden at *Westminster*,
the Nineteenth Day of *May*, *Anno Dom.* 1761.
in the First Year of the Reign of our Sovereign
Lord *GEORGE* the Third, by the Grace
of God, of *Great Britain, France, and Ireland*,
King, Defender of the Faith, &c.

And from thence continued by several Prorogations to the
Eleventh Day of *November*, 1766, being the Sixth Session
of the Twelfth Parliament of *Great Britain*.



L O N D O N :

Printed by *Mark Baskett*, Printer to the King's most Excellent
Majesty; and by the Assigns of *Robert Baskett*. 1767.

Tar and Feather

This British image criticized American patriots' practice of inflicting pain and humiliation on those who supported Parliamentary authority. It shows the tar-and-feathering of appointed customs commissioner John Malcolm in Boston in 1774. Similar acts by crowds punished a relative few but intimidated many more into compliance with patriot programs that resisted Parliamentary laws. No property-owning requirements limited participation in street crowds.



"The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man, or Tarring and Feathering," London, 1774
Courtesy of John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

Massacre in King Street

Events in Boston in 1770 confirmed many patriots' worst fears about the dangers of putting policing power in the hands of an armed military. British troops in Boston were supposed to see Parliament's laws peacefully enforced. But military occupation of the city created bitter disputes between soldiers and civilians. Five colonists died when soldiers fired on a crowd. Silversmith Paul Revere, a fervent patriot activist, created prints of the event to fan the flames of public outrage. This copy from Revere's plate was made in 1832.

The BLOODY MASSACRE perpetrated in King-Street BOSTON, Von March 5th 1770 by a party of the 29th REG^t



Engraved Printed & Sold by PAUL REVERE BOSTON

Unhappy Boston! see thy Sons deplore,
Thy hallow'd Walks beinur'd with guilt's Gore.
While faithless P—n and his savage Bands,
With murderous Rancour stretch their bloody hands;
Like fierce Barbarians grinning o'er their Prey,
Approve the Carnage, and enjoy the Day.

If falling drops from Rage from Anguish Wring,
If speechless Sorrows lab'ring for a Tongue,
Or if a weeping World can ought appease
The plaintive Ghosts of Victims such as these;
The Patriot's copious Tears for each are shed,
A glorious Tribute which embalms the Dead.

Copy Right Secured.

The unhappy Sufferers were Mess^{rs} SAM^l GRAY, SAM^l MAYERICK, JAM^s CALDWELL, CRISPUS ATTUCKS & PAT^l CARR
Killed. Six wounded, two of them (CHRIST^l MONK & JOHN CLARK) Mortally

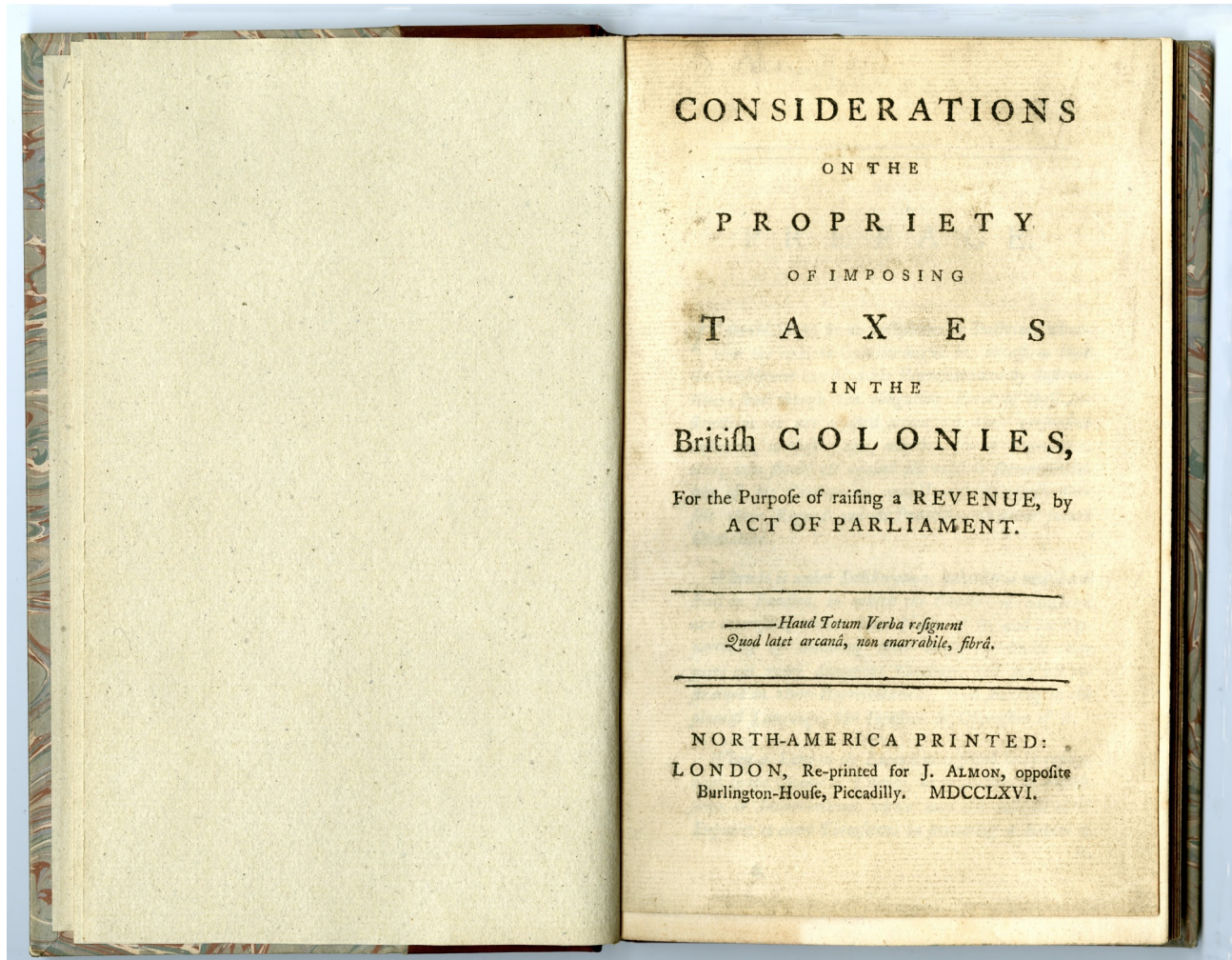
Boston, (Printed & Published) Republished at 15 Water St. March 22, 1822.

Print, "The Bloody Massacre," 1832

[View object record </collections/nmah_530073>](#)

The Power of the Press

Widespread literacy made possible the effective circulation of ideas through published pamphlets, newspapers, and other print products. These publications circulated news and opinion to a growing number of subscribers and to patrons of taverns, which often provided papers for common reading. Even illiterate people could listen and debate current events when someone read aloud to the group.



"Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes," by Daniel Dulany, 1766

[View object record </collections/nmah_513424>](#)

Hours & Admission

Open every day, except December 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Admission is free and no tickets are required.

Location & Contact

1300 Constitution Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20560 <<https://www.google.com/maps/place/smithsonian+national+museum+of+american+history/@38.8912835,-77.0322449,17z>>

Contact Information </about/contact>

Our mission is to empower people to create a just and compassionate future by exploring, preserving, and sharing the complexity of our past.

Sign Up For Our Newsletter

Donate </support>

Email powered by MailChimp

(Privacy Policy & Terms of Use <<https://mailchimp.com/legal/>>)

Press Center </press> **Shop Museum Store** <<https://www.smithsonianstore.com/category/museums/american-history.do>> **Smithsonian Institution**
<<https://www.si.edu>> **Privacy** <<https://www.si.edu/privacy>> **Terms of Use** <<https://www.si.edu/termsfuse>>

